

Back Again, Back Again: Not in This Lifetime

Abigail, as the preroll: Hello hello hello! We are back after a month of not actually super being away – if you didn't catch what was going on, Back Again, Back Again took a midseason break for the month of July and in its place came the spinoff – sword and spinner! I've talked ad nauseum about how much I love Chloe, there's a long blooper reel on the patreon, because we can't be normal recording together, and if you want to hear us having a deeply silly time, you know where you can do that. Yay, spin-offs!

This episode also kicks off the weekly episodes that are happening for the month of August – this is the overdue thank you, thank you, thank you for making BABA an award-winning podcast this year, a thing I still cannot believe. Thank you again to everyone who voted and made their friends vote, and thank you to everyone who has participated in this silly little fandom in some fantastic way – nothing makes me happier than seeing all the gorgeous fanart and listening to you guys theorize in the server.

As always, you know where to find me. Here's being back to BABA!

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode sixteen: Not in This Lifetime

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyas: Leander sang a burial song for Silas. She was the one Io had killed - knife to the back, on the way out. So close to making it out - what a celebration that would have been, what a victory: no casualties, Leander back, joy and joy and *hope*.

But of course, it hadn't gone that way. I hadn't even processed Io's comment until I slammed into my friends, too caught up in my own ridiculous *boy drama* - but then, of course, it was all I could think about. It was a solemn march back, all of us scattering to the wind as the *fretim* always had after a battle back when I was on Cassian's side. It was something quite different, though. I ran, and ran, Callia at my side, Leander at my side, and I did not once stumble or look back. The last time

I'd done this, I was still leaving a dear friend behind. There was nothing for me at the palace anymore.

And – and we'd lost Silas. Cassian did not have any love lost for her. I knew what was happening to Silas's body.

I – I don't know if I ever explained this, listeners. And forgive me all of these past recordings if not. I have a habit of forgetting that there are things that are not intrinsically understood about Rhysea. That you are outsiders; that if I do not say it, it does not exist in your minds.

But – it is important, there, here, for people to be buried when they die. Their body feeds the earth feeds the trees feeds the birds feeds the magic, the magic, the magic that is a circle a cycle a gift. When a body is claimed by the ground the soul is pulled into something new – a reincarnation, of sorts. They do not leave. They become someone new.

When a body is burned – that's the end. Nothing more. No new life, no magic, no circle no cycle no second third fourth life. To burn someone is not just to end them but all of their futures. Everything they could possibly be. Everything they would someday become. It is an act of erasure.

So – Cassian, eyes hard, *burn their bodies*, was never just – *send up smoke as a show and tell and let the smell linger*. It was, *you will never succeed. Not in this lifetime. Not in any*

other. It was, to stand against the kings means that you will lose everyone you love and you will never ever see them again.

No more lists of new words, no more long conversations, no more laughing over dinner. No more hugs where she towered so tall over me she had to stoop to rest her chin on my head. *Not in this lifetime. Not in the next.* And Roena – both of their partners lost in rapid succession. *You will lose everyone you love and you will never see them again.*

We'd succeeded. Leander was free. But as Iolo and Leander and Callia and I made our way back to the camp, meeting up with more and more of our friends along the way – it didn't matter that we weren't choking on the smoke. It was thick around us, that knowledge, that grief, all the same.

We entered the camp. I heard, echoing and buzzing, the cheers – a high survival rate and a mission accomplished was a success story like no other for this rebellion – but it was hard to join in, head swimming and swimming and swimming with grief.

[Laughs.]

Did I ever tell you, listeners? I think I was always too ashamed. Cassian once asked me to light the fire after one of our raids. He hadn't said it like it was a big deal. I'd found my magic; I was nearby. I was convenient and he was busy.

Ilyaas? He'd asked, glancing at me and angling his head, and I, caught up in some other thing, too, muttered *pers furum* and

flicked my hands at the pyre; I'd looked just long enough to see that it had caught and then hadn't thought another thing of it.

I mean, of course they had lovers and families and friends. The people I'd set ablaze that day. I mean - as we went through camp, nervous Leander to Callia's left and I on her right, I was likely looking at some of them. But - ha-ha, wouldn't you know it, I hadn't paid enough attention to any of their faces or names to be able to draw connections. It was easier to be certain you were right, were good, when your keep your enemy faceless. How easy to dehumanize someone you refuse to ever know. How terribly self-serving I'd been.

It weighed, too. On Leander. They told me, much later, that they always considered Silas's death to be their own fault - no, I'd insisted, *it was Io that killed her, it's not you, it wasn't you*, but they nevertheless could never quite seem to be able to stand their ground near Roena.

I mean. I think we all had people like that, by the end of the war. People we felt responsible for the deaths of. And when you lost people against the kings, which meant bodies burnt and no hope of seeing them again or forgiveness in another life - well. It weighed heavier.

So dawn came as we stumbled home, Leander without a lyre, but they found one from someone-or-another - maybe Nat and her book and her skill, maybe a combination of pleading and genuine grief

and the way they were impossible to deny when they asked for most anything - and by the time the sun had just started to rise, they began to sing.

They were golden in that dawn, playing their lament. Their voice shook like it never quite had before and never quite did again - responsibility and fear, personified - and as the camp gathered to listen and the sun came up over the trees, catching behind Leander's head and illuminating them like a stained-glass saint, Callia, beside me, suddenly, pressed my sword back into my hands by the hilt. It hummed, between us, and only then I'd realized that my head hadn't hurt when it was with her. In contrast, she looked a tiny bit green letting go.

But she did not look to me for more than a second. She kept her eyes fixed on Leander, something inside us calling out to them calling out to each other, and carefully, carefully, she said. *Maybe there is something to it. To us. Rex, et poeta, et soldat.*

It was too close to everything that had happened to feel anything more than faint relief at that. There were things still to do: I had to kill Cassian. I wanted, now, to kill Io. In a way I hadn't before - I learned it, that day, what the urge to make someone *hurt* felt like.

This, dear listener, is the true beginning of the glorious story that I promised. The one I'd given my life for, once, and

would still do again if asked of me. Three of us, *rex et poeta et soldat*, united at last.

Perit perribet civitad de ilms, rex et poeta et soldat. We were there. We were there.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you're enjoying the show, please consider leaving a review on your podcast platform of choice or supporting Back Again, Back Again on Patreon at patreon.com/backagainpodcast, where you'll gain access to bloopers, annotated transcripts, episode sneak-peeks, and more. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an Attribution License. The song was retrieved from FreeMusicArchive.org. Visit the description of this episode for full copyright information and a link to the page. Sound effect attribution, similarly, can be found in the episode description.

If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. Please remember that you do not have to fill your days with

action and creation to be worthy of the space you take up. You were made already whole.

The light-soaked days are coming. I promise. I hope you have a wonderful day.